

BEaster3

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; I John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

April 14, 2024

Open the eyes of our faith
that we may behold Christ in all his redeeming works.

These words are in our Collect of the Day.

Open the eyes of our faith
that we may behold Christ in all his redeeming works.

When have the eyes of your faith been so open so aware –
That you couldn't fathom NOT beholding the glory of God?
The presence of Jesus going with you when you don't want to go alone?
The movement of the Spirit stirring ordinary people to do amazing things?

And then, there are other times when we wish we could see more clearly
with the eyes of our faith;
times when it just isn't coming together for us.
When our eyes see no evidence at all that God is showing up.

A priest who was serving in the Diocese of Atlanta,
told about a time he experienced a real eye-opener,
a time when the eyes of his faith were opened in a whole new way.

He was asked to lead a bible study at an Atlanta rehabilitation hospital
for persons with spinal cord injuries.

One afternoon the priest arrived at the hospital for the bible study.
He had had a long day, and was in one of those not so clear times,
when he felt like he was going it alone.

And he wondered -
in all that stuff he said and did in Christ's name and for Christ's sake,
what Jesus Christ really had to do with it... what God really had to do with it.

At the beginning of the bible study that day
the priest asked the group of residents,
circled around him in their wheelchairs,
how they would know if God was with them
and if God understood their experience.

After a long silence, a young African-American man said,

“If God was in a sip-puff, maybe He would understand.”

A sip-puff wheelchair is the kind used by many quadriplegics, those without the use of their arms or legs. It enables them to maneuver their chair by sucking, or sipping, and blowing, or puffing, on a straw-like device.

God in a sip-puff wheelchair... would understand them.

What an image.

The priest was struck with this image.

He tended to have two views of God in Christ.

God the great Creator - completely out there, all powerful, self-sufficient.

God the Christ - a suffering servant,

slain for the sins of the world, by the sins of the world

This God in a sip-puff wheelchair, said the priest, was a new image for him.

An image of God as a survivor-

God who knows power and autonomy,

God who has experienced being a victim,

And now God who lives from both places.

Both divine and disabled.

The priest said that a few weeks later, he was reading in Luke's Gospel.

Jesus was by Luke's account a very powerful man.

Those who were with him saw him filled with the power of the Spirit as he went through Galilee teaching in the synagogues and was praised by everyone. (4:14).

They witnessed the power of God that was with him to heal when a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus on a stretcher and his friends had to take the man on his stretcher up on the roof and lower him into the room where Jesus was because of the crowds outside the house. And when the man stood up and took his bed with him, they glorified God and were filled with awe. And they said, “We have seen very strange things today.”(5:17)

You can say that again!

And the time he was walking through a crowd of people who had come to hear him teach, and heal their diseases and ease their troubled spirits.

And every one of them wanted to touch him because Luke tells us, power came out from him when they touched him and they were healed. (6:19)

Luke delivers a very powerful man in the person of Jesus.
Indeed, a messiah, anointed by God.

But then, of course, Luke gives us Jesus the victim
as the crowds saw him taken and beaten and hung on a cross.

Then, Sunday evening three days after he was buried,
in the scene we hear today,
Jesus' disciples are huddled up in a house in Jerusalem,
afraid and paralyzed themselves.

Paralyzed by the paradox.
How could such dynamic power and charisma,
so swiftly, go down to the dust?
And they question all that they had come to know of him.

Jesus comes in to them and says,
"Why are you so frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"
Look at my hands and my feet, see that it is I myself. Touch me and see."

Those who had known the all-powerful presence of God in Jesus
and had witnessed the helpless, suffering victim in Jesus,
now had a new thing to grasp.

The point of the gospel in telling about the wounds
is not simply to prove
that this man that can move through locked doors, is not a ghost,
but is the same Jesus they had known.

This is a new thing.
Life and death have come together in the risen, embodied Jesus.

Here was not God's holy power standing over and against death,
overpowering death -

but God's power joining itself to death
and bringing death in to life's embrace.

So that the marks of Jesus' death were changed from horrible reminders of defeat
to proof of something completely different.

James Alison writes that the marks were something like trophies.
Whatever death is, it no longer has the final say on life.

Death now, Alison says, is an empty shell, a bark without a bite.
Death is nothing but a vacant form for God to fill.

When Jesus emptied himself out in his dying,
the outcome was not simply to prove power over death
or to identify so much with the human predicament and finally die with us,
But that Jesus emptied himself out,
turning death into something that can be shown to others
so that they can be not afraid.

Our divine, disabled, Survivor comes to be among us,
to take food with us,
to be touched by us,
allowing his wounds to be examined.
Yes, death really happened to him.
And then he shows us how to join our own deaths and defeats *into* life.
A larger life in God.

And so, we no longer need to haggle with ourselves
“Am I a child of God, loving and giving, Christlike in my living?
Or
“Have I fallen from grace forever,
(have I screwed up)
with no right to claim God’s power in my life?”

We are not meant to live as one or the other.
We are lifted up to live as both!
In Christ, we become the ones to let our life’s marks and scars
become a way to say to others,
“See, my hands my feet, my life,
and behold Christ in all his redeeming work.”